New Global Ethical Priorities in Times of COVID19 -

Answering the Challenges of an Interconnected Mega-Crisis for Health, Climate and Food – 14 Thesis

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1) The Corona-Crisis is aggravating, not solving the effects of the Climate Crisis

In a highly provocative article in the Guardian the chief of UN Environment, Mrs. Inger Andersen, in March 2020 has warned the community of nations[1]: "Nature is sending us a message with the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis". Humanity is placing too many pressures on the natural world with damaging consequences. Failing to take care of the planet means not sufficiently taking care of ourselves. 75% of all emerging infectious diseases come from wildlife. In many cases in former centuries the spread of diseases was hindered by mountains, rivers, natural boundaries between different species. At this new pandemic the virus has infected the most cosmopolitan, extremely individualized and highly interconnected species which has emerged on earth, the human species – exposing its vulnerability in an unprecedented manner. It is quite likely that the Coronavirus Crisis is not just a single, one-time event, but similar zoonosis-based diseases have not only occurred before (Ebola, Nile Virus), but might occur much more often in future, as they present the consequence of a globalized and highly intrusive industrialized human culture which is fundamentally disturbing sensitive balances between the real of humanity and the realm of animal life. It was not just tragic coincidence or fate or even God's intentional punishment which brought this catastrophe over humanity, but The Corona-Crisis is an expression of human behaviour which is based on fundamental imbalances between humanity and nature. It is the intrusive style of human industrialized agriculture and animal breeding in combination with a heavily meat-oriented culture of nutrition which has multiplied the opportunities which exist for pathogens to pass from wild and domestic animals to people. Humans are at war with nature. Unless humanity is ending this war-like relationship towards nature and particularly animals the dangers will continue to threaten the future of global society. Ethical leadership on global scale is demanded to guide and provide orientation for this transition from a narrowed anthropocentric notion of development which negates the ongoing dependency of humanity from the integral whole of the biosphere towards an ecological civilization which recognizes humanity as being an integral part of organic life on earth.

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[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief

2) Corona is no relief for nature yet – rethinking priorities in terms of the protection of biodiversity

There are those who rejoices on news that in the channels of Venice one could observe dolphins to feel excited about the lessoning of ecological pressures in the water channels of the city[2] as well as those who have praised the Corona Crisis for reducing GHG emissions due to a major reduction of international air traffic. Unfortunately the story about the dolphins from Venice was deliberate fake news and reading the Corona Crisis with simplified slogans like "nature has hit the reset button", "animals are taking over" and "wildlife making its comeback where humanity is withdrawing" while pointing to some singular regional phenomena, might be a romantic projection and is far from describing the true and complex picture which altogether is not rosy at all for nature: Both the direct as well as the indicate impacts of Covid19 crisis might not at all be very positive for nature and the biosphere as well as wildlife might be under even greater threat than before:[3] The Corona Virus might affect different species of apes in disastrous ways nobody can clearly predict and assess yet. With drastically reduced tourism also investments for wildlife conservation is being drastically reduced. The economic downturn as a consequence of lock down is leading to a boost for criminal poaching of wildlife species in many tropical areas, the breaking up of regional supply chains of food is increasing pressures of regional populations to go for hunting and kill whatever promised to still increasing hunger. The removal of key surveillance measures on rainforest destruction due to the shifted focus of security forces on Corona lock down measures leads to a dramatic increase in illegal logging as enforcement agencies are unable to conduct raids due to restrictions on movement (Government data suggest that deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon rose 30 percent in month of March). Heavy focus of certain governments to get economy to restart again soon and to get "back to normal" raises serious concerns that the Kairos will be missed to reformulate policies for economic recovery in a way that they reflect the need for social ecological transformation but instead continue old patterns of destructive, extractionist and expansionist industrialized patterns of agriculture and society.

3) COVID19 is no relief for the poor either, but like a burning glass exposing global economic inequalities and a looming hunger catastrophe and food crisis

The Corona Crisis has led to an exponential growth of the contradictions and tensions between rich and poor in the world. Millions of migrant workers have been laid off, struggling to find transport to go home. Foreign remittances of migrants to their families in

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[2] https://ilglobo.com/news/mother-nature-hits-reset-button-venice-canals-run-clear-as-italys-quarantine-measures-lead-to-less-pollution-47540/

[3] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/coronavirus-good-nature-200508120555480.html

Asian or African countries have stopped thereby leaving millions on the brink of starvation. Lock down scenarios which have been applied in the majority of western countries do not work in settings in which up to 40 or 50% of the populations work on daily subsistence level and preventing people to seek for their daily small-scale jobs in the informal economy literally puts them in a situation without any livelihood. The coronavirus pandemic has brought hunger to millions of people around the world.[4] National lockdowns and social distancing measures are drying up work and incomes, and are likely to disrupt agricultural production and supply routes — leaving millions to worry how they will get enough to eat. Having to stay at home, often in appalling conditions of overcrowding or loneliness and threatened by fear of violence, hunger and deprivation, leaves thousands in a situation of great uncertainty, worries and even sometimes aggressions caused by too narrow living conditions. While richer countries are able to mobilize billions of Euros for economic stabilization and recovery measures poorer countries are left behind (The German government has mobilized 156 billions as a rescue package for economy, but still the ministry of development cooperation is struggling to get permission for the small amount of 3 billions to be made available as a special fund for Corona support mechanisms for poorer countries). Countries like Malawi have one intensive care (ICU) bed for every one million people, Sierra Leone has no ICU beds at all, South Sudan has two ventilators for 12 million people, whereas richer countries have thousands. While there are some signs that G20 governments want to reduce the debt burdens for poorer countries, the agreed debt relief of 125 million USD for poorer countries is offset against official development assistances, i.e. what these countries gain in terms of more debt relief they are losing at the same time in terms of support by support by ODA means. Thus the emerging global economic recession will be eating up many of the successes of past development decades and the gulf between rich and poor countries most likely might be widened in the decades to come although it is clear for everybody that the threat of the Corona Virus can be overcome only by fighting it together and in each and every country in the world with the same intensity. Ethical leadership, visionary thinking and political determination is needed to chart a way towards real global solidarity and ecumenical sharing.

4) COPVID19 as exposing misleading myths of industrialized neo-liberal modernity

The Corona Crisis provides a fundamental challenge also to rethink traditional narratives which have informed the exuberance of high tech life-styles in late modernity: The myth that God chose human beings to be the centre of all creation, the myth that the future of humanity is intrinsically independent, separate from nature and always in our own hands, the myth that the growth of our affluence knows no limits, the myth that the market alone will be able to provide regulations to solve all tensions and inequalities, the myth that technology alone will provide all needed solutions to the problems of global human survival

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[4] See: https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises

and justice for all, the myths that globalization essentially is good and serves the benefit and wellbeing of all – all these myths have lost credibility enormously, we are humbled and disillusioned, the optimistic belief that everything in our future can be determined and firmly is in our hands has crumbled. The optimistic future security and self-confidence of modernity assuming that everything is in our hands, seems to be broken. The feasibility of all things through science and technology is fundamentally questioned. There was a time BC (before Corona) when people thought that progress was infinite and human technological advance would soon solve all problems in humanity soon. There also was a time BC when people thought that humanity could leave behind all dependency on our biosphere simply by having the technological means to become emancipated from being tied up with biological strings and conditions, but in the new era AC (after Corona) no sober mind would deny that our self-optimistic technological worldview is thoroughly challenged again. The Pandemic is teaching us not to superficially lean and trust on modern technologies as alone to provide the solutions, but to seriously look at the root causes which are behind the current dilemmas. The "new normal" everybody seems to be pressing for cannot be a return just to the "old normal", but ethical leadership is needed to underline the interrelatedness of the wellbeing of humanity, the wellbeing of creation and the wellbeing of animals to form an equally important component in a new approach to wholistic concepts of development and a one health approach as outlined by the WHO. We are challenged to move towards a conceptual mindset which much more honestly integrates the fragility of the human species into our political and ethical concepts.

5) Strengthening multilateralism and global governance over against narrowminded protectionist nationalism and populist ideologies

It is irritating to realize that despite early signals of warning (the German government had a major study on the likelihood of a Pandemic already from 2012; the WHO had studies available on earlier pandemics, there were early warnings sent to certain governments already end of 2019) there was almost a complete failure of global governance levels to read carefully early warning signals of previous pandemics and to prevent the grave lack of precautionary measures and disaster preparedness. This is although long debates had taken place in in the international discourse on humanitarian assistance about the need to strengthen early preparedness and resilience in local communities. The Pandemic can be fought only by multilateral approaches and combined and tuned efforts and measures of national government. The discussion about who gets access to medical means first and who can buy off the first series of vaccinations is an embarrassing sign of captivity in outdated ideologies of "my country first" mentalities and nationalistic strategies which are completely outdated and unethical in a time of global threats. The lack of strengthening and support for national public health systems and the vast discrepancies of access to sufficient medical care systems and social security in many countries which are less privileged presents a scandal which needs to be adressed urgently for the sake of the protection of the whole of

humanity.   Playing dirty party politics with multilateral agreements on common health care and leaving the WHO in a period when it is needed most is unethical and disgusting while open and critical discourses are needed on how to strengthen and improve this precious instrument of the UN. Ethical and moral leadership is demanded of all faith leaders from the religious traditions of this world to remind governments that there is no alternative towards an inclusive approach toward global health which follows the key intention of the SDG Agenda to leave no one behind.

6) Discerning professions which are "system-relevant": re-evaluating the fundamental value of an economy of social care over against an economy of individualized possessiveness and materialist consumerism

There has been a discourse about key professions which are to be regarded as "system-relevant" in times of a national or global crisis during the lockdown period. This provides a healthy learning lesson for many as the masters of the universe" are not any more just the big VIPs of international finance, trade and military power. What counts in the end are people – often referred to as "heroes of everyday life" and "heroes of solidarity" which are ready to stay in frontline-ministries to provide emergency assistance and social or medical care. Never again have people all over the world been reminded so strongly that in periods of severe health crisis it is human care which holds us up. During the beginning month of our lives, during the last and final weeks of our life, during severe and unexpected period of crisis in our lives – what counts to strengthen us and make us survive are the manifold dimensions of social, medical and psycho-social care – often , but not exclusively provided by women, often hugely underpaid and unrecognized in terms of its societal value. Thus, we need ethical and moral orientation to reassess the key values and priorities in our ranking of professional fields and also the priorities we give to realms of professional life related to the sector of health, medical and psychological support of people.

7) The global health inequity and the vulnerability of migrants, refugees and marginal groups as a call to strengthen the reform of the global health system

Widespread reports of disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among already vulnerable communities worldwide underline the ethical and political dilemmas which are exposing even more by the crisis still unfolding. Low-income and middle-income countries, which are home to more than 80% of the world's population will face a high likelihood of famine and under-nourishment. Disadvantaged people are at higher risk of infection and death from COVID-19, while having less access to care due to systems that treat health as a commodity and not a human right in addition to the fact that most health-care systems are

not prepared to handle a pandemic of this magnitude. Despite widespread acts of solidarity, we are witnessing unconscionable stockpiling by wealthy countries and attempts by many to extract profits from the crisis. Hoarding and speculation should be condemned in the strongest terms and measures taken globally to ensure equitable access for countries with fewer resources. Ethical and political leadership is urgently needed to provide equal access to quality generic diagnostics, medicines, vaccines, supplies, and equipment, and for abolishing any pandemic-related patents. Steps to strengthen universal health-care systems globally and to address the economic disparities that have led to this appalling inequity are more than urgently needed. The unequal impacts of the pandemics can well lead to an intensification of regional as well as global conflicts, an increased spread of feelings of anger, desperation and hatred or even outright violence. Faiths Leaders have to stand up together to demand for basic rights to medical care as well as social security of marginalized groups and to pave a way towards models of genuine sharing and inclusivity in sharing the burdens of this disease.

8) Broadening and deepening a new culture of thoughtfulness - balancing one's own freedom with the interest not to harm others

As people in all societies are experiencing this pandemic as an intense learning process about new forms of social behaviour, of social distancing and new forms of greetings, this also provides a new chance for spelling out new attitude of self-restriction and consideration. There is a movement towards a new culture of thoughtfulness: Individuals are considering the limits of one's freedom and practise new forms of social behaviour which are marked by thoughtfulness and consideration in order not to risk the harming of others. At the same time there are also incidents of a new attitude of ruthlessness where people immediately see attitudes of thoughtfulness as an illegitimate imposition of state authorities and would protect the limitation of personal freedom or would even deliberately risk becoming infected as the limitation of personal freedom is seen as illegitimate from the very start. Broadening an emerging new sense of thoughtfulness and self-restriction out of an attitude of respect and the do not-harm principle from individual social behaviour to collective aspects of general environmental stewardship would strengthen the commitment to sustainability for our future and that of our children and grand-children. Highly differentiated ethical and political leadership is needed to spell out the narrow middle line between necessary protection of essential values of individual human rights and to weigh them against the equally important collective rights of public health and security. Rarely has a major emergency led to so many new and unparalleled situations of ethical dilemmas and needs for carefully balancing different rights like we are experiencing in this period. Highly reflected attention needs to be given to any false attempt to legitimize the restriction of individual personal freedoms by sinister interests of autocratic governments to suppress civil society rights on the one hand, while on the other hand to warn over against an absolutization of individual rights of freedom over against the rights of vulnerable parts of

the population to remain protected, or to weigh and balance the rights and interests of the older generations over against the rights of young families and children, the rights and interests of schools over against the rights and interests of industrial enterprises etc. We are forced to spell out again in more details what the basic social contract demands and entails for our societies both in legal as well as in political and ethical terms.

9) Slowing down Capitalism and Rethinking globalization - inventing new and smart forms of glocalization?

Nobody could have imagined some months ago in the BC era that global air traffic would be moving down by 80% or more in some regions. Deescalating the speed of global mobility and traffic is an unwanted and unplanned global experiment with ambivalent and complex outcomes which need to be accompanied with ethical and political reflexion and careful monitoring to a large extend. On the hand we learn by this dramatic slowing down of global capitalism that the free global circulation of money and goods in itself does not create a more just and equitable world automatically. One the other hand we are realizing that an enforced and ill-prepared slowing down of huge areas of modern industries occur at a huge social price with millions of people put thrown into unemployment and facing huge social insecurity. The upswing of tele-conferencing and zoom-communication technologies which are now predominantly sued to convene international as well as national conferences, workshops and webinars are at the same time posing the question what mount of international and national travel is actually really needed for maintaining a similar quality level of international work and communication exchange. While not idealizing the limited conditions of working in home office and also being aware of huge negative effects of narrowing down human communication to audio-visual digital technologies started from tiny individualized home office cells, the future needs intensive ethical considerations, guidance and leadership in terms of combined sets of criteria for the sustainability, the integral human dimensions and the effectives of modern methods of collaborating and work ethics for the era AC which we have entered. What is decent work – this question needs to be spelled out in relation to the complementary ethical dimension: What are decent and responsible forms of mobility and interconnectivity? What kind of goods really need to be transported around the whole globe to be marketed in other continents instead of being sold on regional markets, where can be move towards more glocalized forms of consumption and production?

10) Dethroning the masters of the universe: How to provide hedgefonds owners and global capital managers sufficient guidance and regulations to serve the common good?

Every global crisis has also its hidden or overt actors which benefit from this crisis. Without playing the game of searching for easy scapegoats or pinpoint only one group one is tempted to read with interest news which have described how in the first weeks of the Corona Crisis global investors have drawn back hundreds of billions of USD from countries in the global South and safeguarded their funds from being located in high risk areas which soon might be affected by drastic consequences of the Crisis. Others have entered into bets on falling prices of bonds and assets assuming that an economic recession and collapsing bigger companies might provide a useful chance to get rid or swallow an economic competitor on the market. The question which needs to be asked here is who is going to cover and participate in the costs of developing emergency answers to the main victims of the Corona Crisis? Are those who have proved to be a major benefiter of the Crisis as it is boosting the digital means of communication also participating in a meaningful manner in the social burdens and the costs of answering the global crisis? How to carry on with the huge amounts of debts now to be covered by national governments? Who is to share in the increased burdens which will come upon the shoulders of the future generations undoubtedly? The question of who is going to pay the long-term costs and whether equal and balances sharing is going to envisaged is an immensely ethical question. We are waiting for more deliberate voices of churches, ecumenical bodies and church leaders as to how the international financial system and its actors need to be called to reforms so as the make the financial system into a vital and reliable partner in solving the crisis and not only a benefiters of the dilemmas created.

11) From neoliberal deregulation and individualism to a new appreciation of the role of the state as provider of social security and emergency preparedness

There was a time BC (before Corona) when people thought that neo-liberal deregulation was the key to more economic progress and vitality. There also was a time BC when people thought that individual actors on the global markets would seek out the best solutions to issues of inequality and for answering essential human needs. But in the new era AC (after Corona) no sober mind would deny that the ideology of neoliberal deregulation has led us astray. States which follow this line are usually those where infection rates are much higher and the responses to Pandemic are chaotic and no clearly strategy is recognizable and effective. The Corona Pandemic for many has brought also a more sceptical view on excessive individualism and belief in leaving economy unregulated, and more open and positive reflection on the essential role of state authorities to secure social security and emergency preparedness in collaboration with CSOs. Good governance of national authorities is essential – CSOs cannot do the whole job. While the state needs to encourage civil society organizations and their role in an open and democratic society, the forms of responses needed in a very short and dramatically tensed time span can only come from a functioning national state of regional associations of states which have a good mechanisms

of agreeing in terms of rapid response policies (like the EU). New ethical leadership and reflection is needed on the balance between reappreciating the need for a clear role of national state authorities, principles of good governance, democratic rights and the strengthening of freedom of religion and civil space of CSOs which have their unique role in all of this.

12) The spread of conspiracy theories, fake news attacks on public truth and the need for a new ethics of honest and reliable communication

As has happened in other periods of global threats and pandemics in earlier centuries encountering the global pandemic now has incited thousands of private propagandists to spread fake news, sell the most weird versions of conspiracy theories and to offer explanations of the crisis which add to feelings of fear and disorientation – all of this being an expression of the widespread insecurity and disorientation which is spreading within and between societies. Apart from the drastic economic impacts of the Pandemics this probably one of the most serious dangers and consequences the Pandemic does have already as it leads to a weakening of trust, of the reliability of public communication and a widespread sense of obscurantist ideologies – the infodemic has ramifications and disorientating implications which might even surpass the negative economic as well as the health related impacts as it leads to an general inner erosion of social cohesion and dialogical approaches to negotiating the future course of our societies. This is an area which needs determined ethical leadership, expertise and trust-building and public apologetic work of faith leaders which cannot be overestimated in its relevance as faith leaders in many contexts are trusted more than political leaders. To counter distorted pictures, to correct any mis-information and scapegoating as well as discriminating picture of people suffering from Covid19 as well as targeting those who allegedly are responsible for carrying the virus into certain regions or ethics communities (many instances of very dangerous and even deadly assaults on innocent people which have been accused of carrying the virus have been reported already) is one of the main ethical and moral tasks of religious leaders as well as FBO representatives. Think tanks like Globethics.net or WCC as well as major ecumenical international organizations like world confessional families and REOs have a crucial task in this area of providing an ethics and honest practise of appropriate information and enlightenment in the best sense of the word and have come up already with strong and prophetic ecumenical statements in this regard.

13) Covid 19 as deepening the global and social digital divide – moving towards a lost generation for education?

With Covid19 Pandemic an unprecedented run to digital methods of communication and education has emerged. People look to Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to adapt to the evolving uncertainty and operate with minimal disruption. All of a sudden, companies are being forced to embrace remote working arrangements facilitated by various productivity and videoconferencing tools. School closures have led to moving classes online. Quarantine restrictions have intensified the use of digital technology to mediate effective communication among family members and friends. But who is able to profit from these technologies? Who is excluded? Who is late to jump on the fast train of digital communication and to be linked to virtual networks? Experience both from cities in the west as well as in countries from the global South show that there are many people still without access to any ICTs and they are even more disadvantaged than before. The lifeline provided by technologies is only available to those who can access them. The digital dive unfolds itself into a major social barrier and an educational divide. Home schooling is not accessible and possible for those either illiterate in computer technologies or simply not in a position to have several technological devices at home as they are unaffordable. It was estimated at the end of 2019, that around 3.6 billion people remain offline. The situation is much worse in Least Developed Countries where only an average of two out of every ten people are online.[5] While progress has been made in bridging the digital divide, COVID-19 has brought to the fore how precarious access to ICTs is in many parts of the world and that access to unfettered and empowering ICTs remain a challenge to many people. The old problem of the global digital divide therefore is exponentially aggravated and worsened by the Corona Crisis to express itself as a major educational and social divide in terms of access to any human communication in lock down situations and particularly access to educational programs.[6] There is a hugh risk that educational inequalities will widen with less than half refugee children worldwide having the chance to attend schools programs still during school closure periods.[7] It needs committed ethical, religious and political leadership to prevent a further widening both of the global and educational divide and to avoid a "lost generation" for and in Covid times![8]

14)   Imagineering a world beyond Corona converted to new standards of ecological sustainability – flattening the bigger curve

"What about the long-term implications of Covid 19? Life as we've known it is unravelling and becoming frighteningly unpredictable and precarious. What happens once we have flattened the curve and our health care workers have gone home for an uninterrupted

[5] https://cs.unu.edu/news/news/digital-divide-covid-19.html
[6] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/technology/china-schools-coronavirus.html
[7] https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/5/5eb94dd14/refugee-children-hard-hit-coronavirus-school-closures.html
[8] https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/16/opinion/coronavirus-schools-closed.html;
https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/21/do-we-really-have-covid-19-lost-generation-one-educators-message-stop-panicking-get-grip/

night's sleep? The long-term prospects are still terrifying: unemployment, hunger, poverty, financial collapse, debt, depression and anxiety, a depleted health care system and dysfunctional schools with unequal and lost learning opportunities. How do we rebuild our lives and our communities out of these ashes? Will our children ever know a time without crisis when the world we bequeath to them is one of continual and worsening environmental and social dislocation? Will we ever find the hope and courage to dream of a future?"[9] While the world might become different with the Corona Virus many religious representatives base their hope on the vision that it will not end with Corona. There is a sentiment of hope based on core religious convictions on the enduring love of God to his creatures that there will be a future - might be with Corona to stay for ever to a certain extent (as it will not disappear totally from the scene even with a vaccine) - , but there could be a future without the imminent life threats of Corona. There could be a future to rebuild our planetary home with new, more solid foundations. "When we are through with Covid 19, there is going to be an even bigger curve to flatten. Climate change will require the greatest sacrifice and adaptive response that the human family has ever mustered."[10] The bigger curve to be flattened is the sustainability curve indicating over-excessive use and exploitation of our natural resources and the depletion of ecological resources given to us in the realm of plants, trees, mineral resources and animals. We need visionary political leadership and proper ethical leadership of churches as well as scientists to prepare visions of how to re-organize our life in order to strengthen the ability of humanity to act together, to overcome narrowminded nationalism as well as ethnocentrism and to face together the huge tasks which we have in front of us to curb the destruction of our planetary systems as otherwise humanity cannot survive. Christians and churches around the globe as well as interfaith ethical thinktanks are encouraged and should proclaim that this new common ethical thinking and envisioning of an alternative model of globalization and strengthening of an ecological and responsible civilization in living within the given planetary boundaries is inspired by biblical faith which tells us that God wants us not to sink in fatalism and fear, but to be inspired by his love to the whole of his beautiful earth

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[9] Kate Davies from SAFCEI, South Africa in her meaningful blog on COVID19 and sustainability: https://www.facebook.com/notes/safcei/faith-hope-and-love-in-a-time-of-covid-19/3105341986172245/
[10] https://www.facebook.com/notes/safcei/faith-hope-and-love-in-a-time-of-covid-19/3105341986172245/